

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 INR-10 NSC-05 CIAE-00
AID-05 /050 W

-----064431 110315Z /64 S

R 100900Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9098
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0324

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID PDEV LA US PORG
SUBJECT: FOOD AID TO LAOS

REF: A STATE 054576, B VIENTIANE 0294, C 77 VIENTIANE 1690

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS ON FOOD AID TO LAOS IN THE LETTERED SUBPARAGRAPHS OF PARAGRAPH 1, REF A. WITH REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION IN SUBPARAGRAPH (A), THE EMBASSY HAS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THERE MIGHT ONLY BE A "TOTAL" SHORTAGE OF FOOD FOR THE LAST TWO OR THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE NEXT MAJOR RICE CROP (OCTOBER 1978) IN THOSE AREAS OF LAOS MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT. A RELIABLE SOURCE ESTIMATED THAT THE PRESENT STOCKS OF RICE IN SAVANNAKHET AND THAKHEK WOULD BE TOTALLY DEPLETED IN EARLY MAY. BY THAT TIME A GOOD DEAL OF THE RICE AID PLEDGED BY FOREIGN DONORS SHOULD HAVE BEEN DELIVERED TO THOSE REGIONS. IN ADDITION THE SMALL DRY SEASON RICE
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HARVEST IN JUNE SHOULD SUPPLEMENT LOCAL RICE STOCKS THERE. AS OF MARCH 10, THE EMBASSY HAD LEARNED OF NO REPORTS OF TOTAL DEPLETION OF RICE STOCKS IN THE PROVINCES MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT. MALIGNA SAIGNAVONGS, AN OFFICIAL IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, TOLD US MARCH 3 THAT THERE WERE SUFFICIENT FOOD SUPPLIES IN THE

NORTHERN REGIONS OF LAOS.

2. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 1(B), LAO SOURCES SAID THAT RICE WAS SCARCE AND MORE EXPENSIVE THAN WAS USUAL AT THIS TIME OF YEAR BOTH IN THAKHEK AND SAVANNAKHET BUT THAT IT WAS STILL AVAILABLE ON THE FREE MARKET AND THAT PEOPLE WERE NOT STARVING. MALIGNA SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT STILL HAD RICE STOCKS TO SELL TO THE POPULATION IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES. RICE IN THE VIENTIANE FREE MARKET HAS BEEN AVAILABLE IN ABOUT THE SAME QUANTITIES SINCE THE LAST HARVEST IN NOVEMBER 1977. THE EMBASSY'S WEEKLY MARKET SURVEY OF MARCH 9 SHOWED THAT THE PRICES FOR WHITE RICE EVEN DECREASED A SMALL AMOUNT FROM THE PREVIOUS WEEK. THE WHO CHIEF REPRESENTATIVE TOLD US MARCH 9 THAT HE HAD HEARD NO REPORTS OF STARVATION FROM HIS LAO SOURCES. HE ALLOWED THAT HIS SOURCES REPORTED SEVERE SHORTAGES BUT THAT THE SITUATION WAS NOT YET DESPERATE.

3. IN REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION IN PARA 1(C), THE UNHCR CONTRIBUTION OF 2,000 TONS OF RICE WAS RECEIVED BY THE LAO VIA THE VIENTIANE THANALENG RIVER PORT IN JANUARY. ACCORDING TO A UNHCR OFFICIAL, THE LAO MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TRANSPORTED AND DISTRIBUTED THE RICE TO FARM SETTLEMENTS IN THE PLAIN OF JARS WITHIN THREE WEEKS OF ITS ARRIVAL. DUTCH AND WFP RICE AID WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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DELIVERED TO THE LAO VIA THE MAKDAHAN/SAVANNAKHET RIVER CROSSING DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF MARCH. THE LAO MEDIA REPORTED MARCH 4 THAT A SHIPMENT OF UNICEF CANNED FISH HAD ARRIVED. THE THAI OFFICIALLY DELIVERED THEIR DONATION OF 150 TONS OF RICE TO THE LAO ON JANUARY 25. ACCORDING TO MALIGNA, NO OTHER FOOD AID SHIPMENTS HAVE YET BEEN RECEIVED BY THE LPDR. THE UNDP RESREP TOLD US MARCH 4 THAT THAT THE CARITAS FOOD AID WAS EXPECTED IN APRIL BUT THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN THE OTHER AID SHIPMENTS WERE EXPECTED TO ARRIVE. SOME TECHNICAL AID GIVEN IN RESPONSE TO THE DROUGHT ASSISTANCE APPEAL HAS ALREADY ARRIVED. PARTS OF THE UN SEED AND FERTILIZER DONATION AND TWENTY WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IRRIGATION PUMPS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED BY THE LAO. IN ADDITION, THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AIR SHIPMENT OF TWENTY IRRIGATION PUMPS IS SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE ON MARCH 13.

4. IN REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 1(D), THE UNDP RESREP SAID THAT ALTHOUGH IT HAD NOT YET BEEN OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED THE USSR WOULD DONATE 10,000 TONS OF RICE. HE SAID THAT THE SOVIETS HAD DECIDED TO MAKE THE FULL SHIPMENT IN RICE RATHER THAN SPLITTING THE AID

BETWEEN RICE AND WHEAT. HE SAID THAT THE PRC WOULD MOST LIKELY DONATE 5,000 TONS OF RICE AND THAT HE HAD NO INFORMATION OF A POSSIBLE SRV CONTRIBUTION. THE EMBASSY LEARNED FROM ANOTHER DIPLOMATIC SOURCE, REF B, THAT THE SRV WAS CONSIDERING GIVING 10,000 TONS OF RICE TO THE LPDR.

5. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 1(E), THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL ADDITIONAL FOOD AID COMMITMENTS SINCE THOSE REPORTED IN REF C. FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY HAS COMMITTED 100 TONS OF FOODSTUFFS TO THE LPDR DURING 1978. THE NORWEGIANS HAVE COMMITTED 4,500 TONS OF RICE. THE AUSTRALIANS HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD GIVE AN ADDITIONAL 1,000 TONS OF RICE, BRINGING THEIR TOTAL
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CONTRIBUTION TO 2,000 TONS. THE EEC CONTRIBUTION HAS

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BEEN REDUCED FROM 5,000 TO 2,500 TONS OF WHEAT, ACCORD-
ING TO THE MOST RECENT UNDP COMPILATION OF AID DATA.
THE UNDP RESREP SAID THAT THE SWEDES WERE ONLY ABLE TO

PURCHASE 8,500 INSTEAD OF 10,000 TONS OF RICE (REPORTED REF C) BECAUSE OF AN UNEXPECTED TAX. THAILAND GAVE 150 TONS (RATHER THAN 15 TONS MISREPORTED IN REF C). THE DANES HAVE PLEDGED ABOUT 8,000 TONS OF RICE. THE WFP HAS COMMITTED AN ADDITIONAL 8,100 TONS OF FOOD AID, AND THE MALAYSIANS WILL GIVE 100 TONS OF RICE AND 10 TONS OF PALM OIL. THIS WILL BRING THE TOTAL OF PLEDGED FOOD CEREAL AID TO ABOUT 58,000 TONS. WITH THE 15,000 ADDITIONAL TONS OF RICE EXPECTED TO BE PLEDGED SOON BY THE USSR AND PRC, THE TOTAL FOOD AID COMMITTED TO THE LPDR WOULD BE ABOUT 73,000 TONS. THE UNDP RESREP ESTIMATED THAT THE LAO WOULD SOON RECEIVE FOOD AID COMMITMENTS OF ABOUT 80,000 TONS. IF HE IS CORRECT THE LAO WOULD BE 33,000 TONS SHORT OF WHAT THEY CLAIMED THEY REQUIRED TO MEET MINIMUM FOOD NEEDS THROUGHOUT 1978.

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6. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 1(F), AS FAR AS WE KNOW NEITHER JAPAN, FRANCE NOR WEST GERMANY HAS COMMITTED FOOD AID TO THE LPDR IN RESPONSE TO THE EMERGENCY FOOD AID APPEAL. THE WEST GERMANS HAVE PLEDGED ABOUT \$95,000, HOWEVER, FOR NON-FOOD COMMODITY AID IN RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL.

7. IN REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION POSED IN PARA 1(G), THE EMBASSY HAS LEARNED OF NO REPORTS THAT THE LAO GOVERNMENT WAS IMPORTING RICE OR OTHER FOOD STAPLES PURCHASED FROM THEIR OWN BUDGET. THE TRADE OF GROCERY GOODS FROM THAILAND CONTINUES TO FLOURISH ON A SMALL SCALE.

8. IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS POSED IN PARA 1(H), THE UNDP RESREP TOLD US MARCH 4 THAT THE UN HAD NO UPDATED INFORMATION ON THE FOOD SITUATION IN THE MOST AFFECTED PROVINCES SINCE THE DECEMBER 1977 DROUGHT ASSISTANCE REPORT. HE SAID THAT THE LAO OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE CONTINUE TO BE HELPFUL TO THE UN EXPERTS.

9. IN REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION IN PARA 1(I), TO OUR KNOWLEDGE NO JOURNALISTS HAVE TRAVELED RECENTLY TO THE AREAS OF LAOS MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT WITH LPDR AUTHORIZATION. THE WEST GERMAN AMBASSADOR TOLD US IN LATE JANUARY THAT THE LAO HAD DENIED A VISA TO A WEST GERMAN JOURNALIST DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE HAD SENT A DIPLOMATIC NOTE REQUESTING THE LAO TO APPROVE THE VISA ISSUANCE. IN EARLY FEBRUARY, HOWEVER, A DUTCH JOURNALIST VISITED VIENTIANE FOR SEVERAL DAYS. (EMBASSY HAS LEARNED THAT AMERICAN JOURNALIST ROBERT SCHWAB VISITED THOSE AREAS OF LAOS MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT. HE

DID NOT TRAVEL THERE WITH LPDR AUTHORIZATION AND HIS
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PURPOSE WAS APPARENTLY NO REPORT ON THE INSURGENCY
RATHER THAN THE DROUGHT CONDITIONS.)
CHAMBERLIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOOD ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978VIENTI00324
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780109-0148
Format: TEL
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780379/aaaacphl.tel
Line Count: 234
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 7dcd18c9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3362771
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FOOD AID TO LAOS
TAGS: EAID, PDEV, PORG, LA, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7dcd18c9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014